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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/SPG, IO/PSC, AND EUR/AGS

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SUBJECT: RE-HATTING AMIS: AUSTRIA AGREES WITH USG STRATEGY

REF: STATE 36548

Classified By: Economic-Political Counselor Gregory E. Phillips for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) On March 7, we conveyed reftel talking points to the MFA's Africa Department and followed-up on March 9 with Georg Lennkh, the MFA's Special Envoy for Africa. Lennkh had just returned from Brussels, where Deputy Secretary Zoellick had briefed EU representatives on the USG position. Lennkh said the EU and USG positions are basically identical: the AMIS should transition as soon as possible into a UN Mission. Lennkh added, however, that the GoA and other Member States supported more nuanced tactics to reach the ultimate objective. The Austrian Ambassador in Addis Ababa, for example, has advised Vienna that intensive lobbying of African leaders would be counterproductive at this point. According to Lennkh, many African leaders feel the USG and EU are pressuring them into a re-hatting decision. In this environment, Lennkh said there are some indications the March 10 AU PSC may not produce a conclusive decision. Lennkh said it is possible the AU will not formally reject the re-hatting, but will postpone a decision.

2. (C) Lennkh opined that there were several factors, which were complicating the situation in Sudan. Recent protests in Khartoum against the UN re-hatting had also injected the cartoon controversy into the mix. Lennkh argued that the USG and EU should send a "tough message" to Sudanese President el-Bashir to stop the protests, underlining that, in Sudan, such demonstrations are impossible without government encouragement. Asked about el-Bashir's true intentions, Lennkh replied that the regime remains concerned that the country could eventually disintegrate because of ethnic and regional rivalries. Lennkh added that, in order to "hold things together," el-Bashir is encouraging different Sudanese officials to pursue different tracks simultaneously. This gives el-Bashir the flexibility to switch tracks to take advantage of changing circumstances. For example, Lennkh maintained that, currently, the Sudanese regime understands it should put more effort into the Abuja political talks.

McCaw